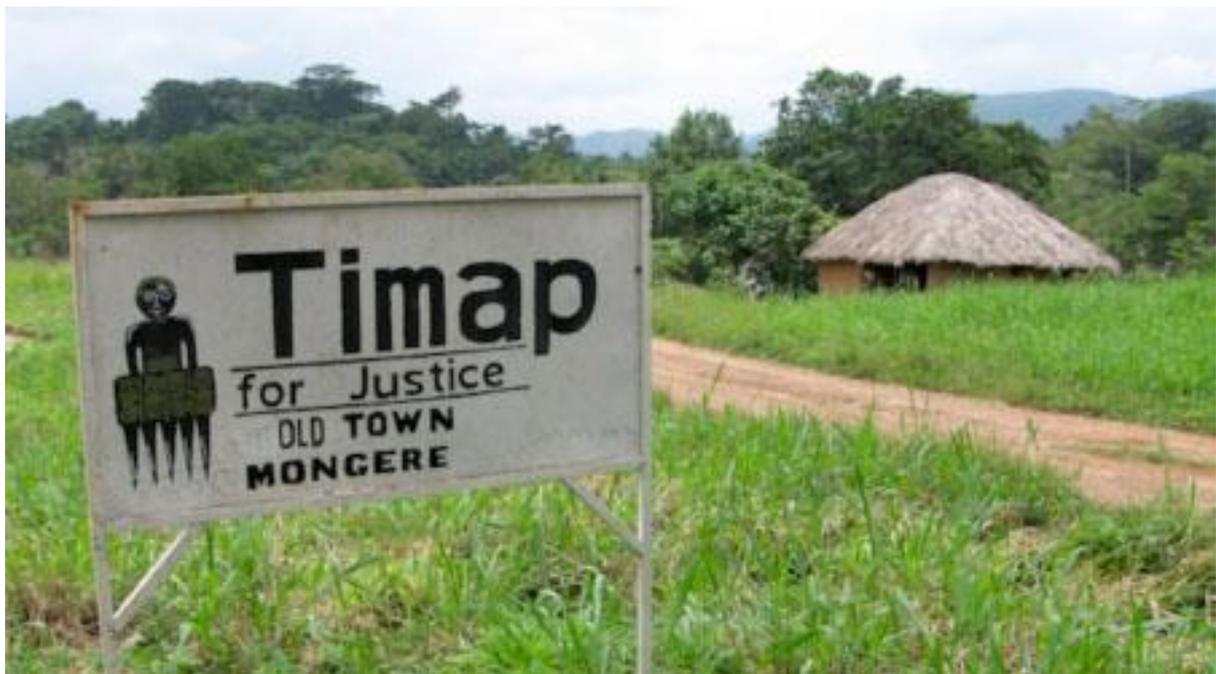


Excerpt from:

**PARALEGAL MANUAL
2012**



**A PRACTITIONER'S GUIDE TO PROVIDING BASIC JUSTICE SERVICES
IN SIERRA LEONE**



Supervision and Management of Paralegals

Background

This comprises a whole section of Paralegal tips for lead paralegals, managers, coordinators and others who may be supervising paralegal work.

Important note on supervision: Supervisors' interactions with paralegals should be dialogic (multiple voices, perspectives or discourses engaging and interacting with each other) rather than didactic (one-way instruction). Though supervisors may have more knowledge of law, or more experience with the program, the paralegals often have more knowledge of their clients, their communities, local customary law, etc. The program will be strongest if supervisors listen for and respect the paralegals' insights. Directors, managers, lead paralegals, and paralegals should discern the program's path together.

Components of Supervision

Visiting Paralegal Offices

- Visit as often as possible.
- Visit unannounced, when you're not expected.

Visiting Mobile clinics

- Join paralegals at some mobile clinics unannounced – this will put them on the alert to conduct their work appropriately at all times.
- Observe them in their work at the clinic – you can come in to help when necessary.
- Help the paralegals develop preparatory notes for meetings at mobile clinics - make sure they are prepared before the mobile clinic day itself.
- Hold periodic meetings with contact persons to get to know how the paralegals are doing at the clinic when you are not with them. Get to know people's perception of the clinic and services provided.

Regular updates and reports

- Ask for weekly updates by phone from each paralegal office - say every Monday. This will help you get correct and regular updates on cases that individual paralegals are handling.

Developing a Paralegal Program: Paralegal Oversight

- Each paralegal should make up a report every month, in a requisite format. You should collect each of these, and give feed back to the paralegals on each report.

Reviewing ledgers

The ledger is a good place to start because it is a log of the paralegal's time. The ledger is a basis from which you can provide constructive criticism on how paralegals can make best use of their time. Make sure to check the following:

- Does the ledger reflect sufficient work?
- Are there days missing or days with little activity?
- What is the condition of the ledger-is it kept tidy?
- Is it properly filled out?
- Is the paralegal managing his time well as stated in the ledger?
- Cross check/compare ledger with case files to verify time management.

Checking general organization

- Are they keeping their files well-organized?
- Are they filling out petty cash forms correctly?
- Are their notes, manual, resource materials from training sessions, etc. all kept in an organized fashion?

Reviewing case files

- Choose some of the cases mentioned in the ledger—cases which the paralegals are presently working on—and ask to see the case files (either the intake form plus documents from the ring binder or, in the case of complex cases, the manila folder).
- Are the developments in each case noted in the case file? Our supervision depends on proper documentation; we should be able to look at the case and understand all that has happened to date.
- Ensure the intake form is properly filled out, with the appropriate case type checked, and names and other details properly filled out.
- Make sure all relevant documents to the case are attached to the file- e.g. statement, copies of letter including invitations and other letters, agreements, photos etc.
- Review the strategy taken in these cases. Ask questions about what the issues are in the case, the approach paralegals followed, about the choices they made, and about their strategy going forward.

Reviewing cases and observing paralegals at work

Working with clients

- Are the paralegals asking the right questions?
- Are they too trusting of the clients that approach them?
- Do they treat clients and all people with respect? Do they identify specifically what clients want and need?
- Are they creative and flexible in finding solutions to justice problems, or do they stick to a standard approach for any given case type?
- Do they adequately follow up with clients after a case is finished?
- Are they taking an *empowerment*-oriented approach? That is, are their clients left with more power and more knowledge than before they approached our office? Or are the paralegals acting as experts providing a service?
- Are they showing adequate concern for the health and safety of anyone in the case who may be vulnerable?

Working with Institutions

- Are they interacting with and engaging government institutions effectively? What about chiefdom authorities?
- Are they effective advocates? Do they conduct advocacy with diplomacy, maturity, and a careful and thorough understanding of the facts?
- How is their interaction with the COB?

Observing paralegals conducting mediation

Some questions to consider when observing paralegals conducting mediation:

- Do they set out ground rules clearly and ensure that the rules are respected throughout?
- Do they do a good job of conducting mediation within a legal and human rights framework? Are they providing relevant legal information?
- Are they evenhanded and respectful in mediation?
- Do they take adequate consideration of any pre-existing power imbalances outside the mediation room?
- Do they refrain from judgment, in both tone and language, and ‘stay above the fray’?
- Do they set out options in clear and simple terms?

Paralegal Ethics

- Are they showing adequate respect for client confidentiality?
- Are they handling money responsibly?

Community level problems

Paralegals especially need the assistance of lead paralegals, coordinators, directors etc. in handling community level cases. Support in the form of advice, planning, participation in advocacy meetings, and the writing and/or editing of advocacy letters is particularly useful.

This is an area of work where there is a lot of room to grow. Ask the paralegals about any community-level problems they are working on, and see if you have ideas for improving the strategy the paralegals have adopted.

- Are there ways the directors/ managers/ coordinators/ lead paralegal should assist with research, advocacy, or litigation?
- Paralegals should seek out community level problems rather than waiting for them to be brought to the office. Help the paralegals to think about the cases they see, present issues facing their community, etc. to identify possible community problems on which the program could have an impact.
- Push paralegals to work toward getting results from community level problems – don't allow paralegals to accept cases and then let them lose momentum, only to claim the client didn't respond, or abandoned the case etc.

Closing cases

The Supervisor should make sure the paralegal actually played his/her role (followed up) to the fullest of his/her ability before allowing the case to be closed.

- Supervisors should be consulted when a case is about to be closed, especially those cases that are closed for reasons other than being resolved.
- Place an emphasis on thoroughness in the handling of cases. Handling a few cases well is preferable to providing a large group of clients with mediocre services.

Meet the parties and past clients

Follow up on other cases paralegals handled in the past, see how clients are doing – and more importantly- see if the paralegals are in touch with their former clients. Randomly select cases to stop and check with clients - both current and previous clients.

For more information, see the full document: [Timap for Justice Community Paralegal Manual](#)